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Notes on type and type locality of the narrow-headed softshell turtle, *Chitra indica* (Gray, 1831) (Testudines, Trionychidae)

by
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Abstract: The attention is called to an actual, fluid-preserved, now lost specimen (ex RCSM 1238.B) of *Chitra indica*, which may have formed part of the type series, previously believed to consist of illustrations only. However, in its absence it seems appropriate to accept Major-General Thomas Hardwicke's drawings as iconotypes. The origin of the actual specimen ("Penang") requires further comments as well, as *C. indica* is not known to inhabit the Malay Peninsula and Pulau Pinang.
Key words: Testudines, Trionychidae, *Chitra indica*, type and type locality.

The specific description of *Chitra indica* was believed to have been based exclusively on water-color illustrations (Nos 31 and 40) of non-extant specimens furnished by Major-General Thomas Hardwicke in India (Iverson 1986, 1992, Smith 1931, Webb 1980, 1989) and subsequently published by Gray (1830-1835). For a detailed history of these drawings see Webb (1980). The very brief original description by Gray (1831a fide Webb [1980]; this is not Gray [1831b] as cited by earlier workers [e.g. Boulenger 1889, Mertens 1969, Minton 1966, Siebenrock 1909, Smith 1931, Wermuth & Mertens 1961]; interestingly, Gray [1864, 1873] himself also regarded his "Synopsis Reptilium" as the source of the specific description) contains no information on any type material. However, the slightly expanded version, which appeared in the same year (Gray 1831b), very clearly refers, though customarily without quoting any catalogue number, to an actual specimen deposited at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, London. On my request, Miss Elizabeth Allen, Qvist Curator of the Hunterian Museum of the same institution (RCSM) kindly supplied me with additional information regarding the whereabouts of this example, which could be considered a syntype. The College suffered heavy bomb damage in 1941, and many zoological specimens were destroyed. Those that remained intact after the war were transported to the British Museum (Natural History), now Natural History Museum, London. However, this actual, fluid-preserved specimen of *Chitra indica* cannot be traced, and is assumed lost. In an 1859 catalogue by Owen, the same example is indicated as "No. 685. The Indian Mud-Tortoise (*Trionyx indicus*, Gray; *Testudo membranacea*, Henderson). Fig. Gray, Illust. Ind. Zool. vol. i. p. 80. Cat. of Tortoises in Brit. Mus. p. 49. Hab. Penang. Presented by Dr. Henderson.". In its absence it seems appropriate to support Webb (1980) and accept Hardwicke's drawings as iconotypes.

The type locality of *Chitra indica* was restricted to Fatehgarh (also written as Futtehghur or Futteghur) on the river Ganges, India by Smith (1931). According to Iverson (1992) it was later not again restricted to Barrackpore, about 23 km N Calcutta by Webb (1980), as stated by Webb (1989). At present, *Chitra indica* is not known to occur at Penang (Malaysia). Instead,

another giant, externally somewhat similar species of softshell, *Pelochelys bibroni* (Owen, 1853) has been reported from the Malay Peninsula and Pulau Pinang (for distributional data of both species see Iverson [1992]), lending doubt as to the real identity of the specimen in question. However, its actual provenance is not known with certainty, and it was entered in the "Rough Minute Book" of the College listing donations to the Museum in 1817 (also containing entries for 1818) as "No. 903. Mr. Henderson. East Indies. Sept. 4th 1818. A specimen of the soft shell'd tortoise, called "mud-tortoise". (Brought by the General Kyd Indiaman, and died on its passage.) + *Testudo membranacea.* Nat. Hist. No. 1238.B". It is also not unlikely that it had in fact originated elsewhere, and had reached Penang, if at all, through human interference. According to Annandale (1912) "there is a Chinese temple on the island in which tortoises from many different parts of the Malay Archipelago are kept".

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